

Lawmaker Sends Letter to Bush Before Major Speech

November 29, 2005

Press Release | Contact: Danielle Langone (202) 225-6416

WASHINGTON, DC—DC—In a letter sent to the president today, U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) restated his call for a plan to begin withdrawing troops safely from Iraq following the December parliamentary elections, and put control of the country in the hands of the Iraqis. DeFazio first stated this position in February. President Bush is scheduled to discuss the Iraq war in a major speech at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD, tomorrow.

In the letter, DeFazio asserts that setting a timeline for withdrawal would boost the new Iraqi government's legitimacy, would send a powerful message by showing that democracy ended the US military presence rather than terrorist acts, could help accelerate Iraqi police and military training and readiness, could undermine support for the insurgent movement and would take away a recruiting tool for al Qaeda. In addition it would help lighten the burden on our over-stretched military and their families and would give US taxpayers some certainty about the true costs of the operation.

Following is the text of the letter:

November 29, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush
President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush:

I am writing to follow-up on my February 17, 2005, letter to you proposing an exit strategy for Iraq. I am again strongly urging you to take a number of concrete actions to improve the situation in Iraq and set the stage for U.S. troops to come home safely and with honor beginning early next year.

I was heartened when millions of Iraqis, even at risk of life and limb, voted in late January to establish an interim government and constitutional assembly; and again in October to ratify a new constitution. And, I am pleased that elections will be held next month to elect a new parliament and permanent government.

The December elections are a significant political benchmark, one that will not be repeated again for some time. Therefore, it is important to take advantage of this opportunity to signal to the Iraqi people in a tangible way that the U.S. has no long-term designs on their country by negotiating a timeline for withdrawal with the newly elected government.

You and others in your administration have rejected negotiating a timeline for withdrawal, arguing that it would allow the insurgents to wait us out. I disagree. I believe a timeline, along with other actions to improve U.S. operations in Iraq, are essential to stabilizing Iraq and setting the stage for U.S. troops to come home.

Most importantly, negotiating a timeline for withdrawal with the Iraqi government elected next month would show that democracy ended the U.S. military presence in Iraq, not terrorist or insurgent violence, which would allow our troops to come home with honor.

A timeline and withdrawal plan negotiated with the Iraqi government would also boost the Iraqi government's legitimacy and claim to self-rule, and force the Iraqi government to take responsibility for itself and its citizens. Negotiating a withdrawal timeline and strategy with the Iraqi government could, more than possibly anything else, improve the standing of the Iraqi government in the eyes of its own people, a significant achievement in a region in which the standing of rulers and governments is generally low.

Similarly, establishing a firm timeline for withdrawal could accelerate the development of Iraqi security forces and deepen their commitment to defending their own country and their own government. It would eliminate the conflict they now feel by working with what many of them see as an occupying force. It would allow them to defend a sovereign Iraqi government, rather than fight alongside U.S. forces. As long as the U.S. military remains in Iraq, Iraqi politicians and security forces will use it as a crutch and will likely fail to take the necessary steps to achieve independence.

Announcing the termination of the open-ended U.S. military commitment in Iraq could also undermine support for insurgents, who have used the wide variety of grievances of ordinary Iraqis arising from the U.S. military presence to generate support for their cause. Establishing a withdrawal plan and timeline would remove one of the chief causes of instability in Iraq, the U.S. military presence itself. A negotiated drawdown and withdrawal would separate nationalist Iraqi insurgents, primarily Sunnis, trying to end the U.S. military presence, from the smaller number of foreign elements in Iraq causing terror for their own reasons. To the extent that a specific withdrawal plan would turn Iraqis (Shia, Kurds and Sunnis) against the foreign terrorists operating in Iraq in the wake of the U.S. invasion, it could be a key turning point in stabilizing the country. Remember, the insurgency is made up of two primary camps — nationalist Sunnis and a smaller number of foreign terrorists. These two camps have different motivations and different goals.

Just as importantly, a specific plan and timeline for withdrawal would provide much-needed relief to over-burdened military personnel and their families and provide some certainty to U.S. taxpayers regarding the ultimate financial burden they'll be forced to bear.

Finally, a plan for withdrawal could also help the United States in our broader fight against Islamic extremists with global ambitions (most notably al-Qaeda) by taking away a recruiting tool and training ground. Porter Goss, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, testified to Congress that, "Islamic extremists are exploiting the Iraqi conflict to recruit new anti-U.S. jihadists. These jihadists who survive will leave Iraq experienced and focused on acts

of urban terrorism.” He went on to say, “The Iraq conflict, while not a cause of extremism, has become a cause for extremists.” In addition, the Commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, General George Casey, testified to Congress earlier this year that “the perception of occupation in Iraq is a major driving force behind the insurgency.”

In addition to negotiating a timeline for withdrawal, with the goal of having the bulk of U.S. troops out of Iraq within six to twelve months, the U.S. should:

- Renounce any U.S. interest in constructing permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq.
- Schedule a prompt and orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops from front line combat positions in Iraqi cities and towns, turning over daily security patrols, interactions with citizens, and any offensive security actions to the Iraqis themselves. Prior to withdrawal, these forces could be redeployed to provide border security in Iraq to stem the flow of foreign terrorists entering the country, accelerate the training and equipping of Iraqi security forces, and contribute to reconstruction projects.
- Accelerate reconstruction spending and grant the bulk of reconstruction contracts to local companies employing Iraqis rather than multinational corporations, which have proven inefficient (fraudulent in some cases), unnecessarily inflexible, and have even imported workers rather than employing Iraqis. Doing so could save American taxpayers money and lead to more rapid improvement in basic services that the Iraqis expected a long time ago. It would also likely mean that more money would go to actual construction rather than security costs. According to one report, security costs for a contract in Basra held by a multinational company accounted for 40 percent of the dollars in the contract. When I was in Iraq, I witnessed the positive impact that small-scale military reconstruction projects were having. Commanders had the flexibility to work with local leaders to get projects done quickly, relatively cheaply, and with Iraqi labor. According to one report, a cement plant that a multinational company claimed would take \$15 million to get running, the Iraqis were able to restart for \$80,000.
- Rather than establishing one of the largest U.S. embassies in the world, reduce the Baghdad embassy to normal size and authority.

I believe the steps I've outlined would reduce hostility to the United States in Iraq, bring home our men and women in uniform with honor as soon as possible, and leave a sovereign, if not ideal, Iraqi government to take care of itself.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

PETER DeFAZIO
Member of Congress

